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**Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
“Improving Our Competitiveness: Common Core Education Standards”
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Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Kline, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to speak today about the state-led common core standards initiative directed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA).

We know that efforts to produce common education standards have been tried and have failed many times before. However, this current effort is fundamentally different as standards are in place in all states, states are frustrated by the inability to make fair and accurate comparisons and they see the benefits that can come from collective state action and have determined to drive this initiative themselves. Currently, forty-eight states, two territories, and the District of Columbia are voluntarily engaged in this initiative and this is why our collective state work is going to succeed. Further, while developing these core standards in English language arts and mathematics, our goal was not just that they be common across states, but that they reflect certain principles: be higher, clearer, and fewer; be internationally benchmarked; include both content knowledge and skills; be evidence and research based; and prepare students for college and career. This initiative is, and has been since its inception, a state-led, voluntary effort and by following these principles we are developing better, higher standards that will support all students, parents, and educators.

Over the past three years, the members of CCSSO who lead state education agencies have been taking strong, innovative steps to reform and improve our nation's system of education. When I became executive director of CCSSO over three years ago, the leadership and I embraced a policy agenda based on our states no longer tolerating incremental reform but taking the lead in making bold changes. I believe this effort being voluntarily led by the states on behalf of all of the nation's children does just that.

In 2007, international comparisons through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicated that American children were ranked well below their peers in leading education countries like Finland, Singapore, Korea, Australia, and Canada.

CCSSO, along with NGA, vowed to change these looming statistics. In December of last year, after much research and discussion with our members, we released a report with Achieve Inc. on international benchmarking and made our first priority the creation of better, higher core standards that are common across states like those high performing countries. Many of our members had already begun efforts along this line with the American Diploma Project and were seeing commonalities emerge. This current state-led effort builds on that and expands it to ensure that all children regardless of zip code are taught to the same high standards that prepare them for college and career and allow them to compete with their peers around the globe.

States have told CCSSO what they need, and we have developed a process that will best support their needs, and ultimately the needs of all students across this nation. Our process is thorough and transparent; we have engaged a tremendous number of stakeholders and interested parties: individual teachers, national organizations, teachers' unions, as well as members of the general public. I am here today to give you complete confidence that states are taking the lead to develop the best standards our country and our states have ever seen. We are committed to the highest quality and our process will result in standards worthy of all of your states' students.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative Explained

I will highlight three important points as I talk about this initiative. First, by keeping this a collective and state-led initiative, we are able to ensure that high standards are applied to each and every student and that will form the basis for many other educational reforms. Second, we are adhering to four foundational principles and a transparent process to develop these standards. Finally, we believe that there are clear benefits of shared standards to all students, parents, and teachers.

I. Collective State-Led Education Reform

Throughout this work, we remain cognizant that the states have the primary responsibility to provide an equitable and adequate education for every child in this country through our 57 public education systems (including the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and all five extra-state jurisdictions), and it is each state's right to determine and define what each student, in each grade level, should know and be able to do. This means that each state defines what its standards are, how those standards will be taught by teachers, and how student learning will be assessed. Through collective state action, we will produce a high-quality set of learning outcomes that the states agree will ultimately produce strong student outcomes while still allowing flexibility for local districts to innovate to get all students to these goals, including English language learners and students with disabilities. We do not believe we would be able to serve all students if this was not a collaborative, state-led process. The establishment of common core standards is a first step toward bringing about real and meaningful transformation of our education system and toward the ultimate goal of preparing all children for college, work, and success in the global economy. We are very

proud that 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia have signed onto the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

We also realize that better, common core standards are only the first step in a longer reform process. However, the standards lay the groundwork for states to continue collective education reform. Even those states that are thought to already have high standards are able to benefit from this work in a variety of ways. With the common core standards adopted, states may take on the process of developing shared assessments, which, among other benefits, would potentially lead to tremendous cost savings at the state level. The standards also allow states to be aligned in how they prepare teachers and how they advance the teaching profession. Further, teachers can have the instructional supports and materials that are aligned to these core standards in order to be effective in teaching them. We are working with several organizations to make sure that these materials will be produced in an effective and open way to allow access to all teachers and schools. With common core standards, states can continue their collective reform efforts in nearly all facets of the education system.

II. Common Core Standards Development Principles and Transparency

As mentioned earlier, even before development of the standards began, this initiative has been driven by the following four fundamental principles to ensure better, common state standards that all students should meet to be college and career ready.

Our first principle involves the design of these common standards to be higher, clearer and fewer. Each one of these design elements is crucial. Higher standards raise the bar to prepare students for international competitiveness. Being committed to higher standards ensures that no state involved in this process will have to lower its standards by adopting the common core. Clearer standards allow parents, students, and teachers to understand exactly what is expected of students as they advance through the system. Fewer standards allow teachers in the classroom to focus on topics in a much deeper way. One challenge that we consistently hear from educators about current standards is that there are too many to cover in the school year. We are focusing the standards in order to maximize student learning.

The second principle is that these standards will be internationally benchmarked. American students are entering a global economy that requires them to compete with students from across the world. Through our development of the common standards, we have looked at other high achieving countries' standards to ensure that we are using the best standards in the world. By doing this, we are creating a set of standards that will allow our students to be internationally competitive when they leave our public schools.

The third principle is that our standards development process is being driven by evidence and research. In the past, standards were based largely on personal judgment. By allowing personal judgment to determine what concepts are in or out of standards, the process often becomes a negotiation, rather than a reflection on what the evidence and

research tells us about the connection between K-12 experiences and success in higher education and promising careers.

The final principle is to align the common standards with college and work expectations. By preparing all students to be both college and career ready, all students are able to be competitive in their post-secondary education and/or career choice. Focusing on all students being prepared for college and career is absolutely critical to the long-term success of our country. Having a set of expectations that are clear to students, parents and educators about what it takes to be college and career ready, the states have taken a major step forward in producing students who are ready for the world.

Now that I have described the principles that guide our state-led work, I want to speak a bit about the process. CCSSO and NGA committed to their respective memberships that we would honor and keep this process as transparent and open as possible. In April 2009, over forty states met to discuss the possibility of creating common core standards in English language arts and mathematics grounded in these principles. By the end of the conversation, 48 states signed on to be a part of the standards development work. Since then, a tight timeline for the standards development process has been fully underway. The first step in our process was to develop college and career readiness standards in the fall of 2009, and then, back-map those standards through K-12, grade-by-grade in early 2010. Using experts and practitioners from across the nation and throughout the world, we have remained true to our original timeline. We have developed the initial version of the college and career readiness standards, which was released in September of this year. These standards have already been reviewed by states, the public, and a range of national organizations and experts. Based upon the college and career readiness standards, we have begun the development of the K-12 standards which are currently being reviewed by states and others. The development of the K-12 expectations will be complete in early February 2010 once the states and the public have had a chance to weigh in.

Once developed, states will begin the process of adopting and implementing the standards. We have defined adoption of the common core standards as the following: a state must adopt one hundred percent of the common core standards; in addition to one hundred percent of the common core, states are able to add up to an additional fifteen percent at their discretion; and, the standards authorizing body within the state must take formal action to adopt and implement the common core. Ultimately, states are responsible for demonstrating that they have adhered to this definition of adoption and states are expected to within three years fully implement the standards by developing instructional supports and aligning assessments.

III. Benefits of Common Standards: Students, Parents, and Teachers

Not only are the common standards a positive development for all students because they help prepare them with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and careers, but, common standards for all students provides consistency in high expectations for learning across the nation, regardless of in which state the student lives. Having common

standards is a critical issue for many students who may have different expectations depending on where they live and which school they attend. These standards will allow students to more easily transition from one state to another without losing valuable learning time adjusting to different standards. Given the mobility of the student population in the United States, common standards is essential. Also, having higher, clearer, and fewer standards makes it very apparent to students what we expect of them so that they can take part in being accountable for their own learning.

For parents, common standards are a positive development because they help them understand exactly what their children need to know and be able to do at each step in their education. With clearer and fewer standards, parents will be better positioned to facilitate conversations with their child's teachers about what they should be learning and how they can reach their goals creating even more accountability in system.

Finally, common standards are critical for teachers as it makes it clear what is expected of their students from year to year. It also allows for more focused educator training and professional development. Strong training of our teachers is paramount, and common standards allow for teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development to be focused on these key objectives.

The Federal Role

To preserve the integrity of this work, it is imperative that this remains as a state-led initiative. However, even while remaining state-led, there are avenues in which the federal government can offer support and ongoing research. Federal law needs to reward this kind of state leadership, not just with funding for assessments, professional development, and other supports, but also by codifying a new form of state-federal partnership that promotes innovation and values state judgment on accountability, particularly in terms of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The current accountability system established under the No Child Left Behind Act will undercut movement toward high standards. By adopting the common core standards, states are voluntarily raising the bar for all students and should be allowed flexibility as they implement them.

Conclusion

As stated previously, there have been previous failed attempts to create a set of common expectations for students in the United States; however, this time states are at the forefront, leading this successful work. Given that international assessments are demonstrating that the United States is falling behind in key measures, the states are collectively and aggressively acting to create better, common core standards which will set the high bar for continuing the hard work of taking all students to college and career ready levels. This is challenging work. We also recognize that having common standards is the necessary starting point, and that there is much work ahead. Now is the time to take action, and the states are responding with thoughtful commitment and collective leadership.

I welcome any comments or questions regarding this state-led initiative, the principles we are adhering to, our transparent process, and how this effort will benefit each and every student, parent, and teacher in our educational system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today. I submitted a more formal statement for the official record.